

Gallery Guide

Playing with Human Geometry

**Joel
Shapiro's
Sculpture**

January 15 - February 26, 1989

The Toledo Museum of Art

Playing with Human Geometry: Joel Shapiro's Sculpture

Joel Shapiro is an internationally recognized leader in contemporary abstraction. He lives in New York, where he was born in 1941. Since the 1970s Shapiro has worked in sculpture and drawing, and recently he has made prints. In each media, he uses a vocabulary of simple geometric shapes: specifically rectangles of various sizes activated by their placement and relationships with one another. These rectangles often refer to particular subject matter such as houses, trees or the human figure.

In this exhibition of five works by Shapiro, from the Museum's collection and from two Toledo private collections, the visitor is invited to explore the artist's use of abstract form, space and human geometry. One print by Robert Longo provides a comparative accent to Shapiro's art.

Questions to assist you in looking at these works are listed here. Please share your comments, questions and insights by writing in the booklet provided.

This exhibition is supported in part by the Ohio Arts Council, and has been organized through a cooperative effort of the Curatorial and Museum Education Departments.

Special thanks to Dr. and Mrs. John Chiles and Mr. and Mrs. David K. Welles, who have generously loaned works of art for this project.

I am interested in what a house or a figure might mean: or what it means to me. I am interested in my capacity to refer to it in terms of sculpture, but not to illustrate it or describe it.

—Joel Shapiro

What parts of the sculpture refer to the human figure? Is the figure standing on one leg? Or is it cartwheeling?

I am interested in those moments when it appears that it is a figure and other moments when it looks like a bunch of wood stuck together - moments when it simultaneously configures and disfigures.

—Joel Shapiro

Take a moment to consider the geometric shapes in the sculpture and how they reappear in other works in this room. Do the shapes in the drawings and print suggest a human figure? Are the shapes connected or pulled apart? Is the sculpture a human form reduced to geometric solids? Or is it a construction of geometric forms that refer to the human figure?

Consider the way these artists have played with motion. Are the shapes static or do they seem to move, tilt, teeter, fall?

Is the sense of motion stronger in the drawings and prints than it is in the sculpture?

Shapiro prefers that this sculpture be displayed directly on the floor, rather than on a pedestal. Consider why that is important.

Exhibition Checklist

Works by Joel Shapiro:

1. **Untitled**, 1982 - 83
Cast bronze sculpture
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 83.59
2. **Untitled**, 1984
Charcoal drawing
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. David K. Welles
3. **Untitled**, 1987
Charcoal, chalk and pastel drawing
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 88.42
4. **Untitled**, 1988
Charcoal, chalk and pastel drawing
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. John Chiles
5. **Untitled**, 1988
Color woodcut print
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 88.87

Comparative work by Robert Longo (American, born 1953)

6. **Frank**, 1983
Color lithograph print
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 83.88